



## Pandemic fears are fading along with omicron: AP-NORC poll

By MICHAEL RUBINKAM  
and HANNAH FINGERHUT  
Associated Press

Omicron is fading away, and so are Americans' worries about COVID-19.

As coronavirus pandemic case numbers, hospitalizations and deaths continue to plummet, fewer people now than in January say they are concerned that they will be infected after the rise and fall of the wildly contagious virus variant, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Just 24% say they are "extremely" or "very" worried about themselves or a family member contracting COVID-19, down from 36% in both December and January, when omicron caused a massive spike in infections and taxed public health systems. Another 34% say they are somewhat worried. More than 140,000 deaths in the U.S. have been attributed to COVID-19 since omicron became the dominant strain of the coronavirus in mid-December.

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John Hickman cheers on a convoy of truckers heading toward Washington to protest COVID-19 mandates, Feb. 23, 2022, in Needles, Calif.

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**A trailer with the words "Freedom! No Mandates" on its back window travels with a trucker caravan heading toward Washington D.C. to protest COVID-19 mandates, Feb. 23, 2022, near Needles, Calif.**

#### Continued from Front

In Lincoln, Nebraska, trucking dispatcher Erica Martinez said she let down her guard last summer, before the deadly delta variant took hold, then "stopped doing a lot of the social stuff" when cases spiked again during successive waves of delta and omicron. Now, with virus numbers falling rapidly, she said she is more comfortable about socializing than she has been in months.

"I feel like the country is desperately trying to recover from the last two years," said Martinez, 36. "I think there will always be new variants popping up, left and right. I think, sadly, this is going to be the new norm for society," with people taking fewer or more precautions as cases ebb and flow.

That's a widespread attitude; most Americans think the virus will stick around as a mild illness, according to

a January AP-NORC poll. Just 15% think COVID-19 will largely be eliminated when the pandemic is over.

Signs the nation is ready to move on from the biggest COVID-19 wave to date are everywhere. Statewide mask mandates have all but disappeared, and on Friday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said it's no longer recommending indoor masking for most Americans, based on current data.

Cities are lifting vaccine requirements to enter bars, restaurants and entertainment venues. Companies are bringing workers back to the office. California said it's taking an "endemic" approach to the virus that leans on prevention and swift containment of outbreaks.

"I think it's reasonable and appropriate for people to live their lives a little more as the risk of infection goes down but to do it in a way

that recognizes that, at some point, we're going to have another wave," said Dr. David Dowdy, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

"And we're going to need to be willing to buckle down just a little bit in the future."

Worries about infection have dipped among both vaccinated and unvaccinated Americans. Still, roughly two-thirds of vaccinated Americans say they are at least somewhat worried about COVID-19 infection. About 4 in 10 unvaccinated Americans say the same.

Amie Adkins, of Gassaway, West Virginia, who is unvaccinated, said she was "surrounded" by omicron but never worried about getting it, counting on a mask and good hygiene to protect herself.

Data shows unvaccinated people are at much higher

risk for serious illness and death than people who got the shot.

"Even after all that, if we're going to get something, we're going to get it, and there's nothing we can do about. So there's no use worrying about it," said Adkins, a 43-year-old stay-at-home mom.

Public support for masking requirements also has ticked down, though Americans are still more likely to favor than oppose requiring masks in public, 50% to 28%, in the new poll. In August 2021, 55% were in favor. Support was much higher, at roughly three-quarters of the public, in 2020.

George Reeves, an 83-year-old semiretired electrical engineer in Raleigh, North Carolina, said his mask might soon come off.

"It's a risk-reward kind of thing," said Reeves, who is vaccinated. "There's some

guesswork involved, but is it worth the hassle? Probably pretty soon it won't be worth the hassle of messing with masks."

More broadly, concern about the spread of infectious diseases as a threat to the U.S. has fallen sharply from a clear majority just six months ago, according to the poll.

About half of Americans now say they are "extremely" or "very" concerned about the threat posed by infectious diseases, down from roughly two-thirds in August. Still, only about 2 in 10 are not concerned.

The current level of concern is similar to an AP-NORC poll in January 2019, well before the global pandemic.

Dave Pitts, a computer engineer and college math and science tutor in Denver, is vaccinated, doesn't socialize much and wears a mask when he goes out, so he's not that worried about getting COVID-19. But Pitts — who spent three miserable weeks battling influenza in the 2009 H1N1 pandemic — predicts infectious disease will continue to pose a huge threat to the country.

He worries about a new, even deadlier variant of the coronavirus.

"I think we're in a better position now, but I think the minute spring break hits, we're going to see something worse show up," he said. "I think humanity's too dumb to be free of this just yet."

The U.S. is still reporting about 66,000 new, confirmed infections per day as the pandemic enters its third year.

In North Carolina, Reeves' restaurant gift certificates have been collecting dust for two years. He said that will soon change as the virus eases its grip.

"After getting vaccinated, the probability of a bad result is really low. I'm reasonably well protected," he said. Martinez, the Nebraska transportation dispatcher, said she looks forward to "actually taking a vacation now, a vacation to try to feel as normal as possible. Maybe Mexico. Mexico sounds wonderful right now." □

**Associated Press**



# State of the Union: Amid disputes, common cause for Ukraine

By LISA MASCARO

AP Congressional Correspondent

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — They have argued viciously in Congress over just about everything: Whether the Capitol insurrection should be investigated or brushed aside. If the president's choice for the Supreme Court should be limited to the first Black woman. Even over whether or not to wear masks in the Capitol building.

But as lawmakers gather for President Joe Biden's first State of the Union address amid the gravity of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, they have mustered a rare and remarkable bipartisan resolve, determined to hold the U.S. and its allies together in the defense of a Western-oriented democracy.

When Biden stands in the House chamber Tuesday evening, trying to make good on what until now has been a faltering attempt to resolve the nation's bitter divisions, he may find that the threat from Russian President Vladimir Putin abroad has become the unexpected force pulling



The chamber of the House of Representatives is seen at the Capitol in Washington, Monday, Feb. 28, 2022, where President Joe Biden will deliver his State of the Union speech Tuesday night to a joint session of Congress and the nation.

Associated Press

the U.S. political parties toward common purpose.

"I think you will see in the State of the Union, a strong bipartisan support for our president," predicts Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., a Biden ally.

The turn of events is both stunning and fragile. Foreign policy has not been

the kind of bipartisan draw it was during the past century, when Congress and the White House worked together as the U.S. dominated the global stage. Factions on the right and left have broken off, most definitively over the long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, creating oddball po-

litical alliances in the U.S. and chiseling away at a shared mission.

The revival of a robust majority that's largely supportive of Biden's strategy toward Russia is even more striking because it is shaping up as one of the most significant rejections of Donald Trump's embrace

of Putin and the former president's praise of Putin's tactics as Russia invaded Ukraine. "We're all together at this point and we need to be together about what should be done," said Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell.

Still, the State of the Union address may not be free of partisan antics, unfolding against the backdrop of a Congress deeply divided over many issues: a prime-time address to the nation, too tempting for lawmakers looking for attention.

This year is particularly fraught amid ongoing COVID restrictions and a Capitol still largely shuttered to the public. That's due in part to safety concerns in the aftermath of the deadly Jan. 6, 2021 assault by Trump supporters trying to stop Congress from certifying Biden's election.

Tuesday's gathering in the House chamber will be the first time since the pandemic outbreak in 2020 and last year's attack on the Capitol that all members of the House and Senate are being invited to gather for what typically has been an annual event. □

## Biden closes out Black History Month with White House event

Associated Press

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — President Joe Biden welcomed Black leaders to the White House Monday for a jovial Black History Month celebration, where he called on Congress to confirm Ketanji Brown Jackson to the Supreme Court, and pass voting rights bills.

"I know progress can be slow and frustrating," Biden said. "But I also know what's possible if we work together, if we keep the faith, if we remember - changes and charges that are passed down to us."

About 150 people including members of the Congressional Black Caucus, state and local elected officials, the Rev. Al Sharpton and the Rev. Jesse Jackson, and other community leaders, were gathered in

the East Room. Members of Biden's Cabinet who are Black and other administration officials stood on stage as Biden called on them by name to express his gratitude.

Biden said he was happy to have the event in-person; the coronavirus prevented the event last year. He was joined by first lady Jill Biden, and Vice President Kamala Harris, who said that the group was gathered at a time when America's democratic principles have come under threat as Ukraine is attacked by Russia.

"Black History Month was established to teach the history that too often has not been taught - the history of black excellence and leadership in America," Harris said.

"And we are clear," she said. "Black history is American history. It is living, breathing history."

Biden was introduced by a high schooler named Cateo Hilton, who mentors younger students in Washington and will attend Delaware State University - news that prompted a standing ovation from the president, who grew up in Delaware.


In his remarks, the president called on Congress to confirm Jackson, who would be the first Black woman on the U.S. Supreme Court. "She is an incredible woman," he said. "She has done so many things."

And he also asked for the passage of voting rights bills, an effort he pushed for but one that has so far failed in Congress. □



First lady Jill Biden wears a mask with a sunflower, the national flower of Ukraine, in support of the Ukrainian people at an event to celebrate Black History Month in the East Room of the White House, Monday, Feb. 28, 2022, in Washington.


Associated Press



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# Georgia Senate passes bill ending gun license requirement

By **SUDHIN THANAWALA**

**ATLANTA (AP)** — The Georgia Senate passed a Republican-backed bill Monday that would do away with the need for a license to carry a handgun in public — eliminating a current background check requirement.

Democrats said the measure would fuel gun deaths and proposed an amendment that would expand background checks, but the GOP-controlled Senate defeated it. Senate Bill 319 passed 34-22 along party lines and now goes to the state House.

Facing a primary challenge from Republicans including former U.S. Sen. David Perdue, Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp has backed the revocation. He says Georgia residents should have their constitutional rights protected and be able to protect themselves and their families amid a spike in violent crime.

More than 20 other states allow concealed weapons in public without a permit, according to Stateline, an initiative of the Pew Charitable Trusts.

Monday's vote was preceded by a lengthy debate that included familiar arguments about gun rights



**Republican state Sen. Jason Anavitate of Dallas speaks to a House subcommittee, Jan. 25, 2022, at the capitol in Atlanta.**

**Associated Press**

and safety. Opponents and supporters also cited recent violence, including the invasion of Ukraine.

Sen. Jason Anavitate of Dallas, a Republican sponsor of the so-called constitutional carry legislation, said criminals were unlikely to go through the state's permit process. Republicans have argued the bill

would remove an unnecessary burden on people seeking to exercise their Second Amendment rights. "Today, we empower good people, law-abiding people," Anavitate said.

Republican Sen. Chuck Payne of Dalton, another bill sponsor, recalled flashing his pistol when his family was approached by men

who appeared high during a camping trip in eastern Georgia and wondered what would have happened if he had been unable to afford the fee for a gun permit.

"What would have been the outcome that day?" he asked.

Other Republicans pushed back on concerns of vio-

lence, saying the guns themselves were not to blame. Republican Sen. Matt Brass of Newnan cited the invasion of Ukraine.

"Ask yourselves, 'What would a Ukrainian citizen say about their right to take up and bear arms?'" Brass said.

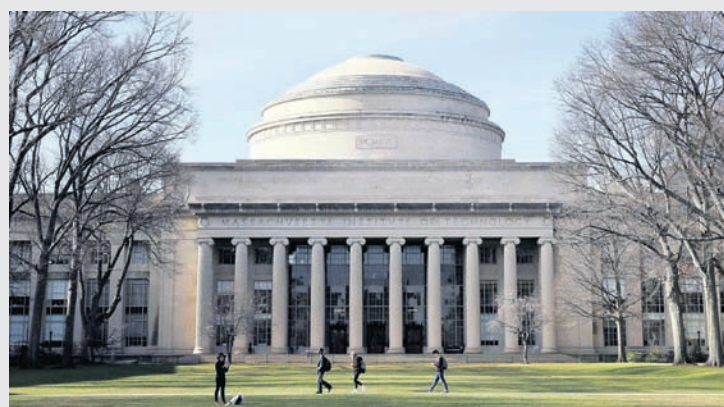
Democratic Sen. Elena Parent of Atlanta said the bill advanced the agenda of "extremist gun groups" and was among a slew of measures on "wedge issues" that were being pushed this year. It would not protect crime victims, she said, citing the school shooting in Parkland, Florida, and last year's slayings at three Atlanta-area massage businesses.

"We know what we need to do to protect our communities," she said. "But we're doing the opposite."

Sen. Nan Orrock, an Atlanta Democrat, suggested those who voted for the bill would have blood on their hands because the legislation would continue "the bloody trail of people injured and killed with gun violence here in our state."

The bill would do away with the need for a license to carry a handgun in public — either openly or concealed on one's body. □

## MIT severs ties with Russian school after Ukraine invasion



**Students walk past the "Great Dome" atop Building 10 on the Massachusetts Institute of Technology campus, April 3, 2017, in Cambridge, Mass.**

**Associated Press**

**CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (AP)**

— The Massachusetts Institute of Technology is severing ties with a research university it helped establish more than a decade ago in Russia, citing the country's "unacceptable military actions" in invading

Ukraine.

The Cambridge university said it notified the Skolkovo Institute of Science and Technology in Moscow on Friday that it was exercising its right to terminate the MIT Skoltech Program.

Federal law enforcement

officials and foreign policy experts have long voiced concerns about the potential for espionage and technology theft arising from MIT's partnership with the school, which has close ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin's government, GBH News reported.

"This step is a rejection of the actions of the Russian government in Ukraine," MIT said in a statement posted on the program website. "We take it with deep regret because of our great respect for the Russian people and our profound appreciation for the contributions of the many extraordinary Russian colleagues we have worked with."

The university said it is work-

ing with MIT researchers leading Skoltech projects to make sure students can complete their research and academic work.

About 21 faculty members and 38 students and post-doctoral researchers at MIT are impacted by the change, though none are currently at the school in Moscow, The Boston Globe reported.

The Skolkovo Institute of Science and Technology said in a statement to the newspaper it has nine ongoing projects with MIT and remains "in close contact with our colleagues at MIT."

MIT partnered with the nonprofit Skolkovo Foundation in 2011 to establish the research university as part of a Russian govern-

ment effort to create a science and technology hub akin to California's Silicon Valley or Massachusetts' Kendall Square.

As part of the agreement, MIT helped recruit students and faculty, hosted Skoltech students at MIT, and allowed MIT instructors to teach and pursue research at the Russian school, the Globe reported.

"We affirm our steadfast belief in our colleagues at Skoltech," MIT said in its statement. "They are fellow scholars who have devoted themselves to an ethos of openness and who have contributed their own expertise and knowledge to build a unique and pioneering academic center in Russia." □



# EU shuts airspace to Russian airlines, will buy Ukraine arms

By EMILY SCHULTHEIS and LORNE COOK

Associated Press

**BRUSSELS (AP)** — The European Union agreed Sunday to close its airspace to Russian airlines, spend hundreds of millions of euros on buying weapons for Ukraine and ban some pro-Kremlin media outlets in its latest response to Russia's invasion, EU officials said. That and Germany's announcement earlier in the day that it would almost triple its defense budget this year underscored how Russia's invasion of Ukraine was rewriting Europe's post-World War II security and defense policy in ways that were unthinkable only a few weeks ago.

In what he described as "a defining moment for European history," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said that the bloc's 27 foreign ministers had green-lighted the unprecedented support for Ukraine and that those actions would take effect within hours. "We have decided to use our capacities to provide lethal arms, lethal assistance, to the Ukrainian army by a value of 450 million (euros) (\$502 million) ... and 50 more million (\$56 million) for non-lethal supplies, fuel, protective equipment," Borrell told reporters.

Borrell said EU defense ministers will discuss Monday how to convert the funds into useful military materiel and ensure that it reaches the Ukrainian armed forces. He said Poland has agreed to act as a hub to distribute the arms and equipment. The EU ministers also agreed to add several more people and organizations to a growing list of sanctions. Those included Russian oligarchs whose money, Borrell said, is important for the Russian economy, as well as other key officials, notably those spreading disinformation. Russian President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov have already seen their assets in Europe frozen.

In a separate announcement, Germany's leader said the country would commit 100 billion euros



People rally against Russia's invasion of Ukraine during a protest outside City Hall in Ottawa, Ontario, on Sunday, Feb. 27, 2022.

Associated Press

(\$113 billion) to a special armed forces fund and keep its defense spending above NATO's target of 2% of GDP.

Anti-war protesters, meanwhile, took to the streets in Berlin, Rome, Prague, Istanbul and elsewhere — even Russian cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg and in a dozen Belarusian cities — to demand an end to the war, the largest ground offensive on the continent since WWII.

According to the OVD-Info rights group, Russian police detained at least 2,063 Russians in 48 cities over anti-war demonstrations on Sunday alone. Human rights advocates reported that more than 170 people had been arrested in the Belarusian protests. In Minsk, a large pile of flowers kept growing in front of Ukraine's embassy.

Tens of thousands of people massed Sunday in front of Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, with some carrying posters with slogans such as "Hands off Ukraine," "Tanks to Windmills" and "Putin, go to therapy and leave Ukraine and the world in peace."

The EU's plan to fund weapons would help to buy air defense systems, anti-tank weapons, ammunition and other military equipment to Ukraine's armed forces.

It would also supply things like fuel, protective gear, helmets and first aid kits.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said beyond the weapons purchases, EU nations would shut down European airspace for Russians.

"We are proposing a prohibition on all Russian-owned, Russian registered or Russian-controlled aircraft. These aircraft will no more be able to land in, take off or overfly the territory of the EU," she said.

She said the EU will also ban "the Kremlin's media machine. The state-owned Russia Today and Sputnik, as well as their subsidiaries, will no longer be able to spread their lies to justify Putin's war and to sow division in our union."

Von der Leyen added that the EU will also target Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko for supporting Russia's military campaign in Ukraine.

"We will hit Lukashenko's regime with a new package of sanctions," she said.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's announcement of new defense funding is hugely significant for Germany, which has come under criticism from the United States and other NATO allies for not investing adequately in its defense

budget.

"It's clear we need to invest significantly more in the security of our country, in order to protect our freedom and our democracy," Scholz told a special session of the Bundestag in Berlin. Scholz said the 100 billion euro fund (\$113 billion) was currently a one-time measure for 2022. Still, Scholz indicated Germany will exceed the 2% of GDP threshold going forward, signaling an overall future increase in defense spending.

A day earlier, Germany announced another major policy shift, saying it will send weapons and other supplies directly to Ukraine, including 500 Stinger missiles, which are used to shoot down helicopters and warplanes, and 1,000 anti-tank weapons.

Israel announced it was sending 100 tons of humanitarian aid — medical equipment and medicine, tents, sleeping bags and blankets — to help civilians in Ukraine. Israel also offered itself as a potential mediator during a phone call between Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Putin, the Kremlin and Israel said. Bennett spoke also Friday with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who is Jewish.

As Greece sent more mili-

tary aid, Turkish officials termed Russia's invasion a "war," a categorization that could lead Ankara to close down the Turkish straits to Russian warships, which Ukraine requested earlier this week. The 1936 Montreux Convention gives Turkey the right to bar "belligerent states" from using the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus during wartime but provides an exception for Black Sea vessels to return to port.

On the sanctions front, Japan joined the United States and European nations in cutting key Russian banks from the SWIFT international financial banking system. Japan will also freeze assets of Putin and other top Russian officials, while sending \$100 million in emergency humanitarian aid to Ukraine, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told reporters.

Catholic and Orthodox religious leaders, meanwhile, prayed Sunday for peace, voiced solidarity with Ukrainians and denounced the Russian invasion.

At the Vatican, Ukrainian flags fluttered in St. Peter's Square as Pope Francis delivered his weekly Sunday blessing and appealed for global solidarity for "the suffering people of Ukraine."

"Those who make war forget humanity," Francis said. He refrained from citing Russia by name, in apparent deference to his hopes of keeping dialogue open with the Russian Orthodox Church.

Also Sunday, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople described Russia's invasion as "beyond every sense of law and morality" and pleaded for an end to the war.

Patriarch Bartholomew is considered the spiritual leader and first among equals of Eastern Orthodox Christians worldwide. He granted the independence of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which severed it in 2019 from the Russian church to which it had been tied since 1686. The Russian Orthodox Church severed relations with him as result. □



# As tensions simmer, China demands U.S. action to improve ties

**BEIJING (AP)** — China's top diplomat called on the U.S. Monday to take steps to improve ties, as tensions simmer over Taiwan, trade and other issues.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi's remarks Monday were delivered virtually to a forum marking the 50th anniversary of the Shanghai Communiqué signed during the icebreaking 1972 visit to China by President Richard Nixon.

That trip led seven years later to the U.S. and China establishing diplomatic relations, upon which the U.S. cut formal ties with Taiwan, which China claims as its own territory to be brought under its control by force if necessary.

Wang urged Washington to "reinstate a reasonable and pragmatic China policy" and work with China to put their relations on track. He reiterated China's complaints that the U.S. was not upholding its commitments but didn't mention any specific steps China would take.

The sides need to view their relations "in the broader perspective, with a more inclusive attitude, and choose dialogue over confrontation, cooperation over conflict, openness over seclusion, and integration over decoupling," Wang said.



In this image made from video, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi delivers an address during a forum marking the 50th anniversary of the Shanghai Communiqué signed during the icebreaking 1972 visit to China by President Richard Nixon in Shanghai, Monday, Feb. 28, 2022.

Associated Press

China has been particularly irked by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's characterization of ties as "competitive when it should be, collaborative when it can be, adversarial when it must be," saying the sides should be cooperating across the board, in spite of their sharp differences.

"The United States should truly see China as a partner in the course of development, rather than an adversary, and power games," Wang said. Rapprochement between Washington and Beijing in 1972 was largely drive by

their mutual distrust of the Soviet Union.

In the decades since, China has grown increasingly close to Moscow, while U.S.-Russia tensions have soared over the war in Ukraine.

Chinese leader Xi Jinping met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Beijing earlier this month and China has refused to either condemn or endorse Russia's actions, despite its insistence on upholding national sovereignty above all. China, along with India and the United Arab Emirates, abstained in Friday's

11-1 vote on a U.N. Security Council resolution demanding that Moscow immediately stop its attack on Ukraine. On Monday, the Foreign Ministry said the imposition of sanctions on Russia would "disrupt the process of political settlement."

"China must decide where to stand and understand that bilateral relations with the U.S. will only become more strained in the absence of a clear choice to stand with international law," said forum participant Jacob Lew, chair of the influential National Commit-

tee on U.S.-China Relations and a former U.S. treasury secretary.

The Shanghai Communiqué dwelled extensively on the status of Taiwan, which split from the mainland amid civil war in 1949 and has never been governed by the communist People's Republic of China. Following the 1979 break in ties with Taiwan, the U.S. Congress passed legislation assuring that the U.S. would ensure Taiwan could defend itself and treat threats to the island as issues of "major concern."

Taiwan continues to be the main irritant in U.S.-China relations, particularly as successive U.S. administrations have approved arms sales to the island and increased high-level contacts with the democratically elected government in Taipei.

On Saturday, China's Defense Ministry protested as provocative the passage of the guided-missile destroyer USS Ralph Johnson through the Taiwan Strait. The Strait is in international waters and the U.S. Navy said the ship's passage "demonstrates the United States' commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific. The United States military flies, sails and operates anywhere international law allows." □

# Clashes at Jerusalem flashpoint, dozens hurt, detained



Israeli police officers detain a Palestinian man next to Damascus Gate just outside Jerusalem's Old City, Monday, Feb. 28, 2022.

Associated Press

**JERUSALEM (AP)** — Israeli police fired stun grenades, rubber bullets and waste-

water canons Monday to disperse Palestinian stone-throwers at a gate to Jeru-

salem's Old City, a frequent flashpoint from which tensions rapidly escalated in the past.

Palestinian medics said 33 Palestinians were injured, including an 11-year-old girl hit in the face by a stun grenade. Police detained 20 Palestinians and said four police officers were also hurt.

The confrontation erupted at the Damascus Gate as large crowds streamed through the arched passage toward the Old City's Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, Islam's third holiest shrine. Worshippers marked what Muslim faithful believe is Prophet Mohammad's ascension to heaven.

It was not immediately clear what sparked Monday's clashes. The area around the Damascus Gate has been a scene of confrontations in the past, including during last year's holy month of Ramadan when devout Muslims fast from dawn to dusk.

At the time, police prevented Palestinians from gathering at Damascus Gate after breaking their daily fast, as was customary. Nightly clashes erupted, with tensions rapidly spreading and triggering a two-week war between Israel and Gaza's militant Hamas rulers. Ramadan, a time of heightened religious fervor, is to start this year at the begin-

ning of April.

Muslim religious officers administering the Al-Aqsa Mosque area estimated that about 90,000 worshippers attended Monday's holiday. The raised platform is revered by Jews as the Temple Mount, site of their biblical temple. The compound's Western Wall is the holiest site where Jews can pray.

The Old City is located in east Jerusalem, which was captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war, along with the West Bank. Some 700,000 Israeli settlers live in the two areas. The Palestinians seek both areas as parts of a future independent state. □



# Mexico's efforts paltry in face of nearly 100,000 missing

By MARÍA VERZA

Associated Press

NUEVO LAREDO, Mexico

(AP) — For the investigators, the human foot -- burned, but with some fabric still attached -- was the tipoff: Until recently, this squat, ruined house was a place where bodies were ripped apart and incinerated, where the remains of some of Mexico's missing multitudes were obliterated.

How many disappeared in this cartel "extermination site" on the outskirts of Nuevo Laredo, miles from the U.S. border? After six months of work, forensic technicians still don't dare offer an estimate. In a single room, the compacted, burnt human remains and debris were nearly 2 feet deep.

At the site -- to which The Associated Press was given access this month -- the insufficiency of investigations into Mexico's nearly 100,000 disappearances is painfully evident. There are 52,000 unidentified people in morgues and cemeteries, not counting places like this one, where the charred remains are measured only by weight.

And people continue to disappear. And more remains are found.

"We take care of one case and 10 more arrive," said Oswaldo Salinas, head of the Tamaulipas state attorney general's identification team.

Uncounted bone fragments were spread across 75,000 square feet of desert scrubland outside Nuevo Laredo. Twisted wires, apparently used to tie the victims, lie scattered amid the scrub.

Each day, technicians place what they find -- bones, buttons, earrings, scraps of clothing -- in paper bags labeled with their contents: "Zone E, Point 53, Quadrant I. Bone fragments exposed to fire."

They are sent off to the forensic lab in the state capital Ciudad Victoria, where boxes of paper bags wait their turn along with others. They will wait a long time; there are not enough resources and too many



A forensic technician, guarded by a National Guardsman, stands inside a ruined house where bodies were ripped apart and incinerated, on a plot of land referred to as a cartel "extermination site", on the outskirts of Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, Tuesday, Feb. 8, 2022.

Associated Press

fragments, too many missing, too many dead.

Meanwhile there is no progress in bringing the guilty to justice. According to recent data from Mexico's federal auditor, of more than 1,600 investigations into disappearances by authorities or cartels opened by the attorney general's office, none made it to the courts in 2020.

Still, the work goes on at Nuevo Laredo. If nothing else, there is the hope of helping even one family find closure, though that can take years.

That's why a forensic technician smiled amid the devastation on a recent day: She had found an unburnt tooth, a treasure that might offer DNA to make an identification possible.

When Jorge Macías, head of the Tamaulipas state search commission, and his team first came to the Nuevo Laredo site, they had to clear brush and pick up human remains over the final 100 yards just to reach the house without destroying evidence. They found a barrel tossed in a trough, shovels and an axe with traces of blood on it. Gun-

fire echoed in the distance. Nearly six months later, there are still more than 30,000 square feet of property to inspect and catalog.

The house has been cleared, but four blackened spaces used for cremation remain. In what was the bathroom, it took the technicians three weeks to carefully excavate the compacted mass of human remains, concrete and melted tires, said Salinas, who leads work at the site. Grease streaks the walls.

Macías found the Nuevo Laredo house last August when he was looking for more than 70 people who had disappeared in the first half of the year along a stretch of highway connecting Monterrey and Nuevo Laredo, the busiest trade crossing with the Unit-

ed States.

Most who disappeared here were truck drivers, cabbies, but also at least one family and various U.S. citizens. About a dozen have been found alive.

Last July, Karla Quintana, head of the National Search Commission, said the disappearances appeared to be related to a dispute between the Jalisco New Generation cartel, which was trying to enter the area, and the Northeast cartel, which wanted to keep them out. It's not clear if the victims were smugglers of drugs or people, if some were abducted mistakenly or if the goal was simply to generate terror.

The phenomenon of Mexico's disappearances exploded in 2006 when the government declared war on the drug cartels.

For years, the government looked the other way as violence increased and families of the missing were forced to become detectives.

It wasn't until 2018 -- the end of the last administration -- that a law passed, laying the legal foundations for the government to establish the National Search Commission. There followed local commissions in every state; protocols that separated searches from investigations, and a temporary and independent body of national and international technical experts supported by the U.N. to help clear the backlog of unidentified remains.

The official total of the missing stands at 98,234. Even without the civil wars or military dictatorships that afflicted other Latin American countries, Mexico's disappeared are exceeded in the region only by war-torn Colombia. Unlike other countries, Mexico's challenge still has no end: authorities and families search for people who disappeared in the 1960s and those who went missing today.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's government was the first to recognize the extent of the problem, to talk of "extermination sites" and to mount effective searches.

But he also promised in 2019 that authorities would have all the resources they needed. The national commission, which was supposed to have 352 employees this year, still has just 89. And Macías' state commission has 22 positions budgeted, but has only filled a dozen slots. There the issue isn't money; the difficulty is finding applicants who pass background checks. "This issue is a monster," Macías said. □





# LOCAL



## Test today, fly tomorrow during the holidays

**PALM BEACH — MedCare's Fit2Fly COVID-19 Testing Centers has improved its services when it comes to turn around time for results. As of November its offering same day test results ( previously it was 24 hours) on both PCR and Antigen tests.**

This in part is to comply with the updated December 6, CDC requirement for travel to the United States, where all air passengers, regardless of vaccination status, must show a negative COVID-19 test taken no more than 1 day before travel to the United States.

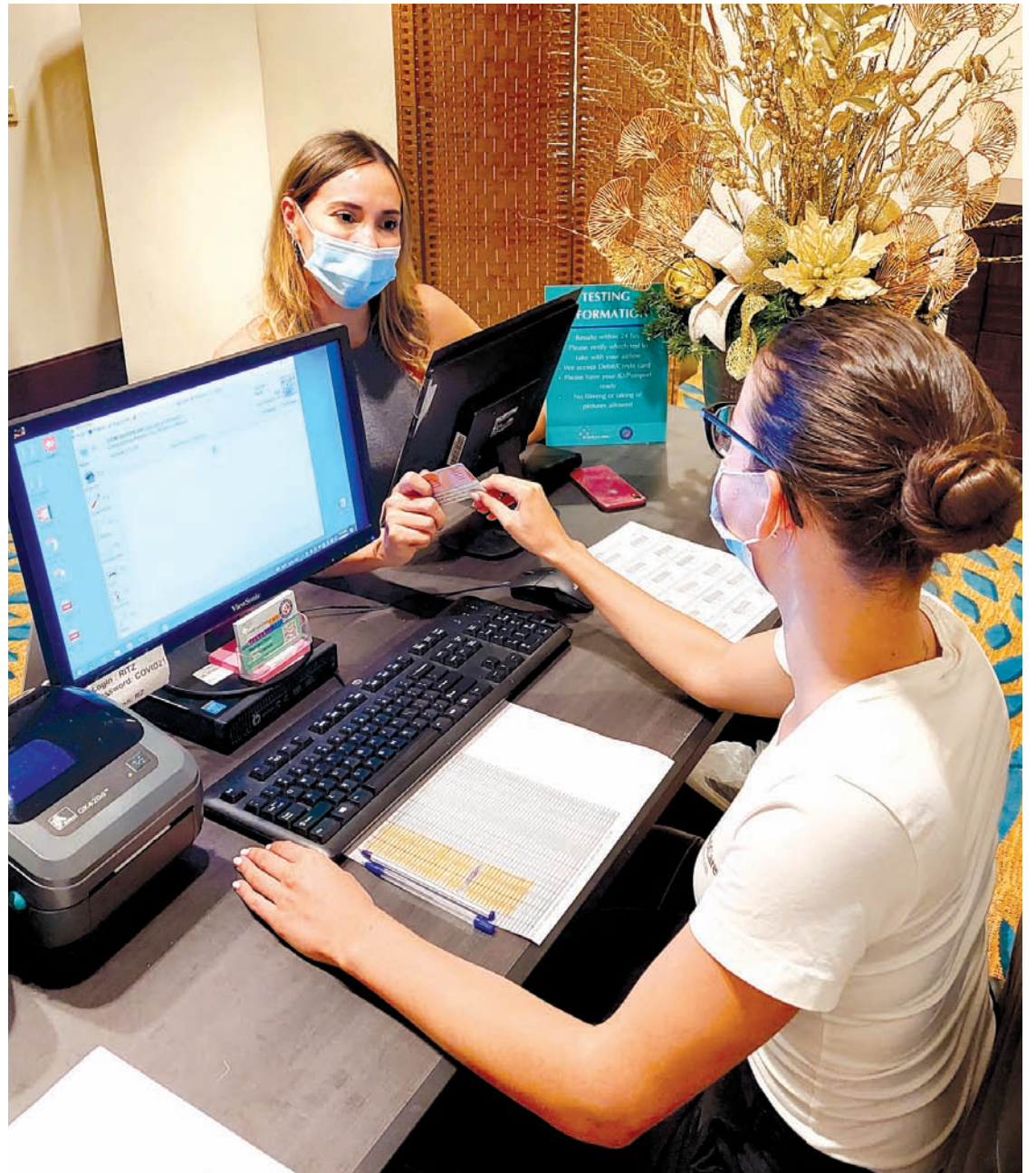
MedCare Fit2Fly Testing Center at the Cove Mall is opposite the Holiday Inn and is open every day for walk-ins from 8 AM through 6 PM. MedCare's other location is situated at The Courtyard by Marriott Aruba Resort, is across the street from the RIU Hotel and is open every day from 8:00 AM until 2 PM. These two locations are at a stone's throw from your resort, condominium, or other vacation accommodation. Walk-ins are welcome.

MedCare Clinic, a high-quality medical clinic that specializes in urgent care for tourists and that has been appointed as the national COVID-19 clinic for tourists, and Laboratorio di Servizio, a full-service modern medical laboratory with state-of-the-art equipment, have partnered up to provide fast and reliable COVID-19 testing to all. Laboratorio di Servizio is ISO-15189:2012 accredited by the Dutch Council for Accreditation (M317).

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For a selection of resorts in Aruba, MedCare has setup Testing Centers on site:

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- Divi Aruba Phoenix Beach Resort
- The Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort
- Hyatt Regency Aruba Resort and Casino
- Renaissance Wind Creek Aruba Resort
- The Ritz-Carlton Resort.

Please contact your front desk for more information on our Testing Centers at these properties.

### Private bookings

For your convenience, Medcare also offers private testing at your accommodation/hotel room for a one-time service fee of \$120. This fee covers testing up to 10 people (one appointment, at one location and a specific time). Additional persons will be charged \$10 per person. Regular testing fees applies. □

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## Andy Osborne retires from formal work and ATSA

**ORANJESTAD** - The retirement of hotelier Andy Osborn was announced recently at the ATSA meeting, the Aruba Timeshare Association, held at La Cabana Beach Resort & Casino.

The meeting was attended by the Minister of Tourism and Public Health, members of the Aruba Timeshare Association, also present Ursell M. Arends, the Minister of Integrity, Nature, Transport and Elderly Care and Endy Croes, the Minister of Education and Sport. ATSA President Luigi Heredia, Costa Linda Beach Resort, expressed his heartfelt gratitude for service rendered in the name of the association and together with Sulaika Kelly, Playa Linda Beach Resort, presented Andy with a lovely painting, a typical Aruba landscape by artist Elvis Tromp.

Andy who arrived here from Barbados has lived in Aruba since 1992 and has worked tirelessly for tourism in various functions. His career took him from the Aruba Caribbean Hotel to Sun Development where he managed Casa del Mar and the Aruba Beach Club, then to the Mill Resort, Palma Real and in

past years Paradise Beach Villas, shoulder to shoulder with Freddy Albertus.

Andy was the first president of the Aruba Timeshare Association, as it was just formed.

In his own words, the timeshare resorts felt they were contributing to the hotel association at the time, 1997, but had no voice in many major decisions. That 'taxation without representation' propelled the timeshare resorts to form their own association, separate from AHATA, the Aruba Hotel & Tourism Association, and while ATSA is perhaps less vocal than its big sister AHATA it is nevertheless very active in the community and works in close collaboration with the University of Aruba and with the Aruba Tourism Authority. Andy, an excellent public speaker, delighted the forum with his stories from the good ol' days of ATSA with fellow-hoteliers Jan van Nes and Lee Di Giovanni and the many projects undertaken by the association from adopting EPB, a secondary vocational school, to Adopt an Addict, and many beautification projects, including the Aruba Product Enhancement Fund responsible for beach

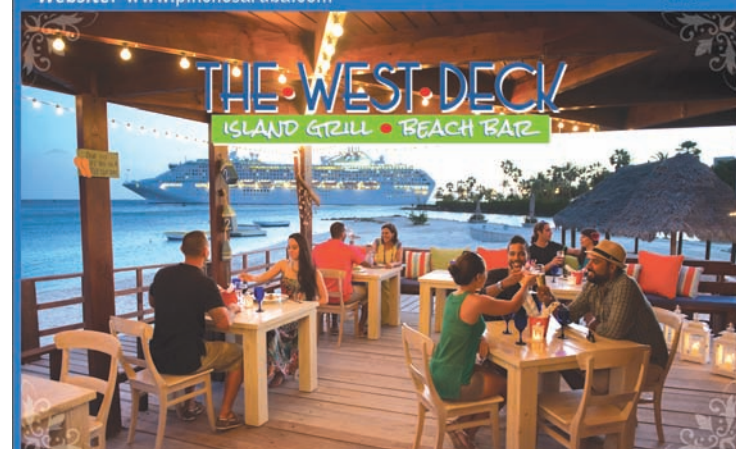
and roadside cleanups and the Security Foundation.

Andy announced he was retiring from formal work but not from fun. It was an absolute pleasure to serve the association, he said, but he will from now on direct his attention to a number of community projects related to the elderly. Member of ATSA offered Andy a lifelong membership in the association: "Stop in for lunch at any meeting," they said, "thanks to your diligence, we can afford to feed you!"

ATSA's 15 member resorts, are all committed to continue making Aruba one of the top popular destinations in the Caribbean. They are: Amsterdam Manor; Aruba Beach Club Resort; Caribbean Palm Village Resort; Casa Del Mar Beach Resort; Costa Linda Beach Resort; Divi Dutch Village Beach Resort; Divi Aruba Phoenix Beach Resort; Divi Village Golf and Beach Resort; Eagle Aruba Resort & Casino; La Cabana Beach Resort and Casino; La Quinta Beach Resort; Marriott Aruba Ocean Club; Marriott Aruba Surf Club; Paradise Beach Villas; and Playa Linda Beach Resort. □



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## ATA Honoring the Peetsolds of The Netherlands at Milagro's Garden Apartments



**By Clyde Harms**  
**ORANJESTAD - On February 25 Aruba Tourism Authority (ATA) honored two loyal Aruba visitors with a certificate naming them "Ambassador of Goodwill".**

In a mildly emotional, yet very professional speech, Mr. Johnathan Boekhoudt of ATA thanked the Peetsolds profusely for their loyalty to Aruba and presented them with some Aruba souvenirs. He also gave a history of the three different ATA certificates, "Distinguished Visitor" for those coming to Aruba regularly

for 10+ years, "Goodwill Ambassador" for 20+ years and the more recently created "Emerald Ambassadors" after 36+ years. The Peetsolds's close relationship with Aruba goes back more than 50 years. After marrying Geertje Dokter in June 1972, Cris Peetsold came to Aruba for the first time in December 1973 to assume a teaching position at Abraham de Veer School in San Nicolas. They first lived in Santa Cruz, but later moved to Siribana 4A where they stayed till August 1977 when they returned to Holland. During

these 4 years the Peetsolds made many friends among the people of Aruba. Their daughter Marieke was born in Oranjestad in June 1977. After she obtained her VWO-diploma in Holland, Marieke returned to her birthplace and worked for 9 weeks at a vacation job on the "Jolly Pirates". Following her graduation in Holland in 2000, their second daughter Evelien did an internship at THE NEWS for five months. THE NEWS was an English language newspaper published by the legendary Gerrit Schouten. Cris and Geertje

returned to Aruba for 10 days to visit her, look up old friends and get re-acquainted with this beautiful island and its people. It felt like coming home. Little had changed visibly, except that there were many more houses in the "kunuku" (country-side) and there were fewer empty beer bottles on the side of the roads. Beaches were still clean and quiet, and almost always there would be a traffic jam on the boulevard. The Aruban people were as friendly and courteous as the they remembered them. The

Peetsolds met good vibes everywhere. Since that visit to Aruba, Cris and Geertje have returned at least 15 times, staying at different places looking up old friends and making new acquaintances. Cris said that he and Geertje had stayed at Airbnb all over the world, but have never enjoyed one as much as Milagro's Garden Apartments's tranquility, responsiveness, cleanliness and friendliness. They have already booked reservations for the whole month of February 2023 for themselves and friends. □



**ORANJESTAD - You are back and we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.**

## Aruba to me

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Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again.

For today we received a picture from Silvia Sperling Canabarro from Porto Alegre, Brazil, who wrote "Aruba to me is that one place that we will choose to return to for the rest of our lives. The most beautiful and relaxing place, that brings out the best in us. Our 11th visit, during the pandemic, was healing to our souls." □



# Why you (and I) should name a 'trusted contact'

By **LIZ WESTON** of NerdWallet

For the past few years, financial services companies have been bugging me to name a "trusted contact." Banks, brokerages and insurers increasingly want to have someone to call or email in case they notice suspicious activity and can't reach the account holder.

I ignored these requests. Trusted contacts are a great idea for older people experiencing cognitive decline, I thought, but that's not me.

Then a younger friend developed early-onset dementia, and I realized we don't always get enough warning to put such protections in place.

Clearly, trusted contacts aren't just good for older people. Anyone's financial accounts could be vulnerable if they're displaced by natural disaster, wind up in the hospital, suffer a brain injury or are traveling and hard to reach. Helping your brokerage, bank or insurer connect with someone who knows what's going on in your life could protect your money and prevent financial catastrophe.

"I love the idea of the

trusted contact, because it can really head off any fraud or exploitation before it snowballs out of control," says Amanda Singleton, a family caregiving expert for AARP and an estate planning attorney in St. Petersburg, Florida.

## TRUSTED CONTACTS CAN'T MAKE CHANGES

Naming a trusted contact doesn't give that person authority over your accounts or the ability to see balances or make changes, explains Gerri Walsh, senior vice president of investor education at the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority, known as FINRA. FINRA is the nongovernmental organization that regulates the securities industry, including brokerages.

Instead, your trusted contact can help financial services companies reach you (if you're reachable) or identify others who might help. If you're incapacitated, for example, your contact might connect the company to your legal guardian or the person with power of attorney over your accounts. If you've died, your trusted person could provide contact information for the executor of your estate or the suc-



This undated file photo provided by NerdWallet shows Liz Weston, a columnist for personal finance website NerdWallet.com.

Associated Press

cessor trustee of your living trust.

You aren't required to name a trusted contact, but financial services companies — along with regulators and consumer advocates — recommend it. You can change your trusted contact whenever you want, or name more than one. Ideally, a trusted contact is someone you're confident will protect your privacy and act responsibly.

"It could be an adult child,

a close friend, an attorney or some other trusted person that the financial institution can reach out to for extra help to try to reach you," says Deborah Royster, assistant director for the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's Office for Older Americans.

## A TRUSTED CONTACT COULD THWART FRAUD

The push to name trusted contacts started out of concern for older Americans being scammed out of their life savings. More

than 369,000 cases of financial fraud of older adults are reported to authorities each year, causing an estimated \$4.84 billion in losses, according to a January report by Comparitech, a cybersecurity research company.

But this kind of fraud is notoriously underreported, often because victims are embarrassed, worried that others will think them incapable, or protective of the perpetrators, who may be loved ones, caregivers or neighbors. Comparitech estimates the real toll may be 8.68 million cases and more than \$113.7 billion in losses each year.

To help reduce that toll, two new FINRA rules were approved in 2017. The first allows brokerages to put temporary holds on withdrawals when financial exploitation is suspected, and the second requires brokerages to "make reasonable efforts" to get customers to name trusted contacts.

So far, other financial services companies such as banks, credit unions and insurers don't have similar rules. Even so, some are offering the opportunity to name trusted contacts on accounts, Royster says. □

# BP exiting stake in Russian oil and gas company Rosneft

By **DEE-ANN DURBIN**

BP said Sunday it is exiting its share in Rosneft, a state-controlled Russian oil and gas company, in reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

BP has held a 19.75% stake in Rosneft since 2013. That stake is currently valued at \$14 billion.

London-based BP also said its CEO, Bernard Looney, and former BP executive Bob Dudley will immediately resign from Rosneft's board.

"Like so many, I have been deeply shocked and saddened by the situation unfolding in Ukraine and my heart goes out to everyone affected. It has caused us to fundamentally rethink BP's position with Rosneft," Looney said in a statement.

Rosneft said it was informed of BP's decision Sunday.

"BP has come under unprecedented pressure from both the regulator and its shareholders. BP's decision was preceded by a Western media campaign full of false reports and conclusions," Rosneft said in a statement on its website that was translated by The Associated Press.

"The decision of the largest minority shareholder of Rosneft destroys the successful, 30-year-long cooperation of the two companies." BP Chairman Helge Lund praised the "brilliant Russian colleagues" BP has worked with for decades, but said Russia's military action "represents a fundamental change."

"The Rosneft holding is no

longer aligned with BP's business and strategy and it is now the board's decision to exit BP's shareholding in Rosneft," Lund said in a statement.

BP's action was an abrupt turnaround from earlier this month. During a conference call with investors on Feb. 8, Looney downplayed concerns and said there were no changes to the company's business in Russia.

"Let's not worry about things until they happen. And who knows what's going to happen?" Looney said.

Kwasi Kwarteng, the U.K.'s secretary of state for business and energy, said he welcomed BP's decision.

"Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine must be a wake up call for British busi-



A view of the BP logo at a petrol station in London, Tuesday, Aug. 1, 2017.

Associated Press

nesses with commercial interests in Putin's Russia," Kwarteng said in a tweet. BP said it will take two non-cash charges in the first quarter to reflect the change, including an \$11

billion charge for foreign exchange losses that have accumulated since 2013. It is not clear exactly how BP will unwind its holdings, or who might step up to buy them. □



# CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS**  
 41 Moolah  
 1 Staircase part  
 5 Cheese choice

**DOWN**  
 10 Strata-gems  
 12 Ship of 1492  
 13 Due to

15 Tear  
 16 Common conjunction  
 17 Metal source

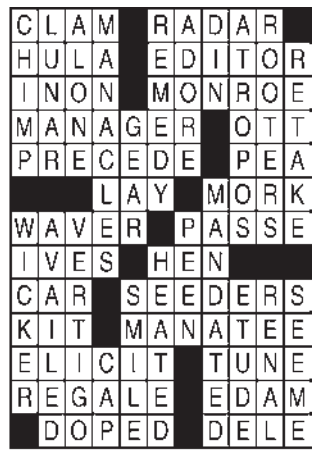
18 Arid expanse  
 20 Addition column  
 21 Arm's length

22 Nuisance  
 23 Message from the boss  
 25 Orpheus played one

28 Of the kidneys  
 31 Track shape  
 32 Without a contract

34 Procured  
 35 Write hastily  
 36 "— pig's eye!"

37 Superficially to  
 40 Dark

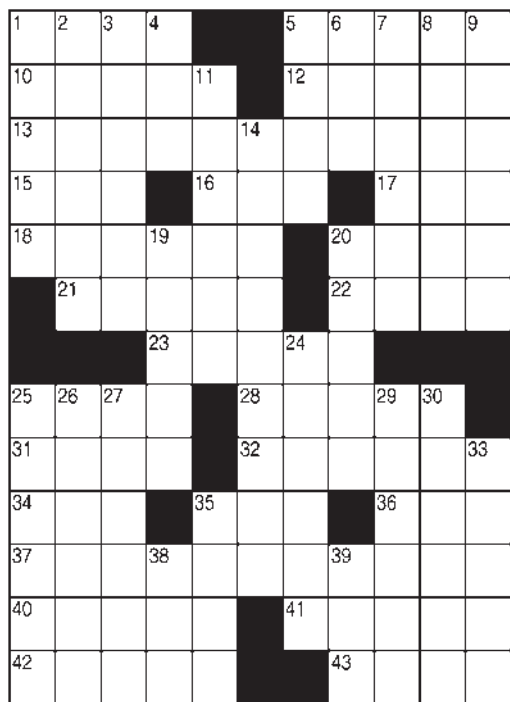


Yesterday's answer

19 Canvas holder  
 20 Some tour-neys  
 24 Brain-based  
 25 Exit a banking site

26 Singer Elliman  
 27 Baby's toy  
 29 Individually  
 30 Poe woman

33 Casual eateries  
 35 "West Side Story" gang  
 38 That fellow  
 39 Young lion



A X Y D L B A A X R  
 is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

3-1 CRYPTOQUOTE

I H T V V U P D K Q M R , L K I Z D T R  
 I D T T V M P T V Z T M V P H K I M D T M N  
 H A I D T W T R B U S , X H K ' V T  
 H G T V N H U R F U I . — E H P D  
 E T R J U R P

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: THE MOST DANGEROUS CREATION OF ANY SOCIETY IS THE MAN WHO HAS NOTHING TO LOSE. — JAMES BALDWIN



This photo provided by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority shows the Hardy Reef near the Whitsunday Islands, Australia on June 22, 2014.

Associated Press

## 'Crisis': Climate panel flags Great Barrier Reef devastation

By KRISTEN GELINEAU

**SYDNEY (AP)** — It was the silence of the sea that first rattled the teenage snorkeler, followed by a sense of horror as she saw the coral below had been drained of its kaleidoscopic color. This once-vibrant site on Australia's Great Barrier Reef — a site she'd previously likened to a busy capital city — had become a ghost town, the victim of yet another mass bleaching event.

On that day in 2020, Ava Shearer got out of the water and cried. Today, with the release of a United Nations climate report that paints a dire picture of the Great Barrier Reef's future, the now-17-year-old marine science student and snorkeling guide wonders what will be left of the imperiled ecosystem by the time she finishes her degree at Australia's James Cook University.

"I definitely worry about it," says Shearer, who grew up along the World Heritage-listed natural wonder off Australia's northeast coast. "I fear there might not be anything for me to study." That bleaching will continue along the reef is a virtual certainty, according to the IPCC. Perhaps even more ominously, the report suggests it may simply be too late to stop bleaching entirely. □



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 2 Bed Ocean view \$17,500  
 2 Bed Garden view \$15,500  
 3 Bed Ocean view \$28,000  
 WK 51 Garden view \$42,500  
 WK 52 Oceanside \$55,000  
 WK 7 and 14 - all views  
**GOLD SEASON**  
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 2 Bed Oceanside \$11,000  
 2 Bed Ocean view \$8,000  
 2 Bed Garden view \$6,000  
 3 Bed Ocean view \$13,000

### Marriott Aruba Ocean Club PLATINUM SEASON

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 2 Bed Ocean view \$18,500  
 1 Bed ocean front \$17,500  
 1 Bed ocean View \$12,000  
**GOLD SEASON**  
 2 Bed Oceanfront \$14,000  
 2 Bed Ocean view \$9,500  
 1 Bed oceanfront \$9,000  
 1 Bed ocean View \$6,500

\*\* Destination Points \$8.00 per point

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Room # 932 \$15 K each  
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## HTTA

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## HTTA

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Studio week 14 room # 6205  
20 weeks remain each  
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## HTTA

### Divi village Golf

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Room # 2160  
32/33 weeks remain  
18 K both weeks  
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## HTTA

### Aruba Divi Phoenix

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## HTTA

### Dutch Village

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Price : \$12 K  
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# Gloomy nights for the Dark Knight in 'The Batman'

By JAKE COYLE  
AP Film Writer

Batman, never a day person, is plunged into perpetual night in Matt Reeves' nocturnal, nihilist, neo-noir take on the Caped Crusader.

Reeves' three-hour-long "The Batman" includes plenty of action, character introductions, gadgets and other various superhero accoutrement. But it is no extravaganza. This "Batman" is a morose mood piece, soaked in shadow and rage, that has stripped the comic's archetypes down to abstracted silhouettes and grubbily human characters. If Jim Carrey's Riddler were to wander into this movie, he would fit in about as well as Bugs Bunny in "Taxi Driver."

Scorsese's movie, with Travis Bickle sneering at societal collapse, was a prominent influence on Todd Phillips' muddled "Joker," but it may be more so for "The Batman," which likewise rests on the precarious psychology of its DC protagonist. Robert Pattinson's is a young Batman, relatively new to the gig and suffering mightily from the nightly battles with Gotham's most depraved. A feeling of helplessness consumes him, and a sense that he can never stem the tide.

"It's a big city," he says in the movie's opening. "I can't be everywhere."

Reeves, the "Planet of the Apes" filmmaker, starts "The Batman" with numerous such gravely voiced



This image released by Warner Bros. Pictures shows Zoe Kravitz, left, and Robert Pattinson in a scene from "The Batman."

Associated Press

intonations — "They think I'm hiding in the shadows, but I AM the shadows" — in a stunning, operatic montage set to Nirvana's "Something in the Way." It's an electric fusion of imagery and sound, and the movie's most fully realized section. This "Batman" is a dirge.

The issue, though, is that "The Batman," having found its tone and immersive atmosphere, wallows in it. There is surprisingly little suspense because the film struggles to find more than one note (powerful though it is) to strike. Even Pattinson's Bruce Wayne is just as downbeat and grave as his Batman. Like a Paul Schrader character, he has

abandoned nearly all social engagement, instead tortuously writing a diary to document the horrors he witnesses nightly. Pretty much since Adam West put on the cape and cowl, Batman has steadily grown darker. But Pattinson's despondent Dark Knight takes the cake.

The comic blueprint is "Batman: Year One," Frank Miller and David Mazzucchelli's 1987 four-issue series in which Wayne turns vigilante. That step — a citizen taking up violence in the name of justice — is much the subject of "The Batman." And while Reeves' film is seldom overtly topical, it's clearly colored by predominant social justice

issues. Today, vigilantism is most associated with cases like George Zimmerman, Kyle Rittenhouse and the fatal shooting of Ahmaud Arbery. "The Batman," mobbed with crooked cops and culminating in a terrorist plot of masked "fringe-types," reflects much of our grim current reality. In the course of the film, Batman's doubts about who gets to mete out justice only grow. OK, but does Batman, like, kick some butt, too? What about the Batmobile? It's not all just a seedy slog through the Gotham sewer, is it? Well, almost. "The Batman" is structured as a detective story. There's a delightful scene where he, in costume, stalks a crime

scene he's been sneaked into by detective Gordon (a fabulous, melancholy Jeffrey Wright). It's a framework — a Batman of questionable vision and even more dubious self-awareness hunting clues — that makes "The Batman" a distinctive work separate from previous movie iterations of the character.

But as Reeves and co-writer Peter Craig weave in the antagonists of this Gotham underworld — a serial killer named Edward Nashton a.k.a. the Riddler (Paul Dano, leaning into serial-killer tropes), the crime lord Carmine Falcone (a suavely villainous John Turturro) and a mid-level mobster Penguin (Colin Farrell, unrecognizable) — "The Batman" wears other influences, like David Fincher's "Seven," more obviously.

As firmly gripped as "The Batman" is early on, you can feel its hold slipping as it extends into its lengthy running time, and I think that's partly because Pattinson's performance is largely limited to either sudden eruptions of fury or timid skulking in the shadows. For an actor who has long stayed clear of the mainstream, it's thrilling to see him take on something this ambitious. But Pattinson's talent lies in his cryptic charisma and that's not always a compelling fit for a three-hour psychological portrait. He's no chatterbox, this Batman.

Zoë Kravitz, however, has a more instant and intimate bond with the camera. □

## Chris Licht appointed as new CNN chief to replace Zucker



Television producer Chris Licht attends The Hollywood Reporter's annual Most Powerful People in Media cocktail reception on April 11, 2019, in New York.

Associated Press

**NEW YORK (AP)** — Chris Licht, most recently Stephen Colbert's top producer at CBS, was appointed Monday as the new head of CNN, where he's expected to take over in May.

Licht's expected appointment to replace Jeff Zucker as chief of CNN was widely reported over the weekend. Before moving into late-night TV, Licht was the chief executive behind the "CBS This Morning" news program and "Morning Joe" on MSNBC.

The appointment was made by David Zaslav, Discovery CEO, who is expected to take over the merged company when Discovery's acquisition of CNN parent WarnerMedia is approved this spring.

Zaslav called Licht a "dynamic and creative producer, an engaging and thoughtful journalist, and a true news person."

He said Licht is "a highly principled individual who is trusted, hard-working and makes every organization

stronger, more innovative and more cohesive."

Zucker was forced out earlier this month, after admitting that he had violated corporate rules by not revealing his romantic relationship with a CNN marketing executive, Allison Gollust. Gollust later exited the company, too.

Licht, in a statement, promised to uphold and build upon CNN's legacy.

"I am looking forward to returning to my journalism roots," he said. □



# Johnson leaving U.S. system in place as next Ryder Cup captain

By DOUG FERGUSON

AP Golf Writer

PALM BEACH GARDENS, Fla.

(AP) — Zach Johnson was on a ski vacation in Colorado in late January when what he figured was a routine video call turned into much more. On the call was the entire Ryder Cup committee asking him to be the next American captain.

"I had a pretty good ski day that day," Johnson said Monday with a broad smile. "I had some blue pants and a red top and I hit the white powder."

The gold Ryder Cup trophy was on a table next to him at PGA of America headquarters as Johnson was introduced as the 30th U.S. captain. His job is to try to achieve what six previous captains could not — win the Ryder Cup away from home.

The 2023 matches are at Marco Simone in Italy.

Johnson is used to beating the odds.

He did not go to a powerhouse college program as a self-described "normal guy" from Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He was pea shooter in an era of cannons. But he won 12 times on the PGA Tour, captured majors at Augusta National and St. Andrews and had a winning record in the Ryder



Zach Johnson poses with the Ryder Cup trophy after being named the 2023 United States Ryder Cup golf captain at PGA of America headquarters, Monday, Feb. 28, 2022, in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.

Associated Press

Cup (8-7-2) despite playing on only one winning team. "I love going over there and competing. I love stretching myself. I love being uncomfortable," Johnson said. "It is going to be hard. But it's also just a beautiful opportunity to go out there and give these guys an avenue to be themselves and play with freedom and that's kind of how I'm going to approach it."

The expectations of the Americans winning on European soil for the first time

since 1993 at The Belfry will be greater than ever. They are coming off the biggest blowout ever over Europe, a 19-9 margin at Whistling Straits.

Johnson wasn't about to change anything. The U.S. went from eight automatic qualifiers and four captain's picks to six of each because of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 that left an uncertain PGA Tour schedule and eventually led the matches to being postponed one year.

Johnson said it will stay the same for 2023 — six qualifiers, six picks — with the same points system in place. PGA Tour players can earn points only at the majors, The Players Championship and a World Golf Championships event this year. And then in the Ryder Cup year, there will be points for every tournament (except opposite-field events), with the four majors getting one-and-a-half more points (double for the winner).

In keeping with the guidelines that came out of the Ryder Cup Task Force in 2014, Steve Stricker goes from being the captain to one of the assistants.

Johnson dodged all questions related to another potential assistant — Phil Mickelson.

Mickelson's inflammatory remarks about the Saudis who are funding a proposed rival league, and his acknowledgement that he was willing to work with the Saudis to manipulate change in the PGA Tour, has damaged his reputation.

Four corporate sponsors have decided to end partnerships with Mickelson, while Callaway Golf has said it has put its relationship on pause.

Mickelson was thought to be a shoo-in as captain for Bethpage Black in 2025, and future captains typically serve as an assistant, as Mickelson was in Wisconsin last fall.

"Given basically where we are right now, I have no idea what lies ahead as far as my vice captains and who is on this team," Johnson said.

He offered roughly the same answer the three times the subject of Mickelson or the rumored Saudi league was mentioned. □

# Medvedev is 27th No. 1 in ATP rankings, overtaking Djokovic

By HOWARD FENDRICH

Daniil Medvedev officially moved up to No. 1 in the ATP rankings on Monday, overtaking Novak Djokovic to become the 27th man to hold the top spot since computerized rankings began in 1973.

Medvedev, a 26-year-old from Russia who won last year's U.S. Open and was the runner-up at this year's Australian Open, rose from No. 2.

Djokovic slid down one place after having participated in only one tournament in 2022 because he has not been vaccinated against COVID-19. He was deported from Australia and not allowed to try to defend his title at Mel-

bourne Park because he is not inoculated — and has said he won't get the shots, even if he needs them to be able to play elsewhere, such as the French Open or Wimbledon.

Medvedev is the first player other than Djokovic, Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal or Andy Murray to get to No. 1 since February 2004, when Andy Roddick was there. Medvedev is also the first new No. 1 since Murray in November 2016 and the third Russian man to lead the rankings, following Yevgeny Kafelnikov and Marat Safin.

"It's a huge honor to take over this spot. I'm sure everyone can understand it comes with mixed emo-

tions that it happens this week," Medvedev tweeted Monday, an apparent reference to his country's invasion of Ukraine. "Thank you to my wife, team, sponsors, friends, & everyone that has helped along the way. It's a long journey and I look forward to the years ahead."

Djokovic's most recent stay atop the rankings started in Feb. 3, 2020, and his total of 361 weeks there are the most for any man since the tour's computerized rankings began in 1973.

He called Medvedev "very deserving" in a Twitter message last week.

"It's great for tennis, I think, to have somebody new at world No. 1 again," Jiri Vese-



Russia's Daniil Medvedev hits a return to Spain's Rafael Nadal during their semifinal match at the Mexican Open tennis tournament in Acapulco, Mexico, Friday, Feb. 25, 2022.

Associated Press

ly said after his victory over Djokovic in the quarterfinals of the Dubai Championships on Thursday guaranteed there would be a

change this week. "Tennis needs, of course, new No. 1s. A new generation is coming up. I think it's just great." □



# Start this year's vacation with this amazing experience in the heart of Costa Linda Beach Resort.

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**Palm Beach –** When you think of a restaurant that pleases the needs of a whole family or a large group of people with all different tastes? Think Water's Edge Restaurant. Located at the shore of Aruba's most wonderful beach, The Eagle Beach Aruba. Water's Edge Restaurant is guaranteed to serve you a fantastic magical night to remember. Whether you prefer to enjoy the view from indoors air conditioned comfort, outdoors in the soft tropical breeze or under a palapa with your toes in the sand. This spectacular restaurant offers the best ocean view sunset or sky full of stars dinner while the crispy Caribbean night wind caresses your face and plays with your hair.

From the minute you arrive there will be a great staff welcoming you with the most contagious smiles and warmth. The intense menu with a great variety of appetizers, main courses and delicious desserts will not disappoint. Seafood, Steaks and international favorites. All on one menu specially made just for you.

## Culinary Voyage

Start your gastronomic journey with a scrumptious appetizer such as the Maryland Crab Cakes, maybe the Crispy Calamari or the mouthwatering creamy Garlic Tarragon Shrimp. You can also opt for a classic French Onion Soup, a Lobster Bisque or the famously Water's Edge House Wedge, a crisp wedge of fresh romaine lettuce topped with homemade blue cheese dressing, diced toma-



atoes, chopped bacon, caramelized pecans and blue cheese crumbles, drizzled with balsamic reduction. This followed by the Chef's special of seafood such as Fresh salmon filet seasoned and grilled, topped with lemon cilantro butter and served with homemade mashed potatoes and fresh asparagus, a nice plate of Ahi Tuna or a succulent pasta dish like the Florentina Fettuccine Alfredo. Meat Lovers will have their fix with choices of a devourable 22oz. Bone-In "Tomahawk" Rib-Eye, pan seared in garlic infused oil and finished in the oven or our juicy N.Y Strip Loin, seasoned & grilled. All our steaks options are seasoned with a blend of kosher salt and freshly cracked black pepper. Served with homemade mashed potatoes, seasoned vegetables and a choice of red wine reduction, green peppercorn demi glace, mushroom sauce, or bacon blue cheese butter. For extra sides the options are delectable. Fresh as-

paragus, seasonal vegetables, mashed or baked potatoes, fries or rice and beans. Combine your personal choice with one of the most exclusive wine from the great selection of international wines to compliment your dish. Kids will enjoy every item of the specially compiled kids menu and there are also optional dishes for all vegans, vegetarians and gluten-free guests. To end the culinary voyage with some luscious sweetness, the desserts are wild. From a piece of coconut flan, NY cheese cake, carrot cake, chocolate brownie or our classic Tiramisu with kahlua and amaretto served with chocolate sauce and coffee jelly. Not to mention the fresh and light piece of key lime pie.

## Creating memories

If you are planning a birthday dinner, here you will receive a nice bottle of champagne to take home with you to extend your experience even further whether on the beach or your own private balcony.

## Live entertainment

Just about every day of the week, there is a different live entertainment by the best local artists for you to enjoy. Whether you're in a romantic mood, or more in a swinging mood, there is absolutely a night especially for you where you can combine great music with delicious cocktails mixed with concoctions. In addition, Water's Edge offers three daily Happy Hours from 12pm-1pm, 4pm-6pm and again from 9pm-10pm with all premium brands specially priced.

## Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Whether you join us for breakfast, lunch or dinner, Water's Edge Restaurant & Bar offers a relaxed and inspirational dining experience overlooking the beautiful Eagle Beach with spectacular ocean views. Gather with friends and family for drinks and appetizers or a night of pampering and relaxation.



## Thank you to all our guests

From the bottom of our hearts, we would like to Thank all of our guests who showed us so much love and support all through 2021, and hopefully will continue to do so in 2022. What we are most grateful for is that we could get back to doing what we love, which is looking after our guests. So, thank you for every dinner, lunch, breakfast, very to-go order, every glass of wine, every birthday, anniversary and date-night that you spent with us this last year. To our new guests, Welcome! We hope you to see you back soon! □



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